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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: HAMAS Victory, Mashaal Visit,  
Syria/Russia, Lebanon, Iraq (1/30)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today reported President Asad's meeting on January 29 with Khalid Mashaal, Chief of HAMAS' Political Bureau. Talks dealt with the results of the Palestinian elections. President Asad congratulated Mashaal on the HAMAS victory and stressed that the results of the election will enhance Palestinian unity. Both Asad and Mashaal reiterated the importance of respecting the will of Palestinians as expressed at the ballot box, and called upon the various Arab, regional, and international parties to respect this will and deal with the outcome of the election as the legitimate expression of the Palestinian will. Commentators focused on the results of the Palestinian election and called on Americans and Europeans to respect the will of the Palestinian people. Commentators saw in HAMAS' triumph a victory for the option of "resistance" and adherence to Palestinian rights. They called upon the world to apply pressure on Israel to end its occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Papers also featured a Foreign Ministry statement that expressed Syria's shock at the cartoons in a Danish newspaper. The source said that while Syria strongly condemns the encroachment upon the highest symbol of the Arab and Islamic nations, it stresses that respect for the symbols and values of others is what gives the Arab and Islamic culture its human nature and constitutes the basic pillar of dialogue and interaction among civilizations, based on the common values of humanity. The source said Syria calls on the Danish government to take the necessary measures to punish the offenders and prevent the recurrence of such offenses.

On Syrian/Russian relations, papers reported the visit to Damascus by Russian Chief-of-Staff, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky. The two sides exchanged viewpoints on ways enhance and develop cooperation and friendship between the two friendly armies, and on issues of mutual interest.

End summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad congratulates Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah on

the occasion of his oath as Emir of Kuwait and discusses the results of Palestinian elections with Khaled Mashaal, Chief of HAMAS Political Bureau. President Asad confirms that the outcome of the elections will consolidate the unity of Palestinians" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/30)

"Ali Habib, Chief-of-Staff of the Syrian Army, discusses with Russian Chief-of-Staff Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky ways of strengthening cooperative relations between the Syrian and Russian armies" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/30)

"Syrian Foreign Ministry official source: Syria was shocked by cartoons in a Danish newspaper insulting Arab Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and prayers be upon him. Syria calls on the Danish government to take the necessary measures to punish offenders" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/30)

"Former Lebanese Minister We'am Wahab: Some Lebanese MPs are carrying out orders from western embassies" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/30)

"Olmert calls on HAMAS to respect the Oslo Accord and the Roadmap. HAMAS confirms: No change on our charter. We will discuss fulfillment of justice with Bush" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/30)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"A Message of Victory"

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Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra,

commented (1/30): "The HAMAS' election victory was a message from the Palestinian people to the world that the problem lies, first and foremost, with the Israeli occupation and that the approach to a peace settlement, therefore, should be different.... The Western world, which claims to be civilized, free, and democratic, has rejected this Palestinian message and threatened to boycott the next Palestinian government and to stop aid to the Palestinian people...."

"US President George Bush suggested that Palestinians voted for leadership change and for better services.... Palestinians voted for the right of return, for independence, for the creation of a state, and for the restoration of rights, of Jerusalem, and of the occupied territories. They voted for the resistance that will achieve all their objectives."

"The United States and the rest of the Western world, which are calling on HAMAS to change its policy so that they can deal with the movement, should change their policy toward the Palestinian question and the Palestinian people. The United States should respect the results of the election and the will and options of the Palestinian people and refrain from interfering in their affairs...."

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"Before and After HAMAS"

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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, maintained (1/30): "Israel stated that it will not cooperate with any HAMAS government.... Israel has never cooperated seriously with any Palestinian force representing the Palestinian people...."

"The current Palestinian Authority, for example, was established on the basis of agreements and understandings concluded with Israel that the international community, particularly the United States, sponsored. Have the successive Israeli governments seriously cooperated with this Authority? Definitely not; there are thousands of pieces of evidence to prove this. Everyone in

the region and beyond realizes this fact....

"When Palestinians went to the polls and voted so extensively for HAMAS, they must have borne in mind all Palestinian and Israeli probabilities and must have chosen what they saw as more appropriate for them under the circumstances of the occupation and its practices.... They understand what Israel is planning on all levels, primarily on the level of negotiations. And they know what their current Authority offered them and what HAMAS might be able to offer. In the final analysis the choice was definitely their choice, as certified by all local, Arab, and foreign observers....

"The current stage dictates opening a new chapter in Palestinian life based on strong national unity and adherence to national rights. There are positive signals in this regard based on statements by HAMAS and other Palestinian leaders."

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"One Who Claims Democracy must Respect its Results"

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Ahmad Dawwa, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (1/30): "The American and European positions toward HAMAS' election victory show the falsehood of their claims that they support democracy in the region. Those who raise the slogan of democracy need to respect its results....

"Those who criticize HAMAS over its program and rejection of the agreements with the Israelis must ask this question: Is Israel committed to the agreements that resulted from the Oslo Accord and to subsequent accords, so that HAMAS can be asked to abide

by them? Why are successive Israeli governments allowed to reject agreements they have signed with the Palestinians while the Palestinian governments are not allowed to do that? Should HAMAS and others be criticized for their adherence to the rights of the Palestinian people and the will of the voters?

"It is unfair to say that HAMAS won because the Palestinian voters were punishing Fatah for its conduct and monopoly on power. "The Palestinians voted for a political, social, and economic program that HAMAS offered in its election campaign. They trust that the movement will continue to work to implement this program, especially since the movement has effectively been implementing this program on the ground since its establishment.

"If the international community is really eager to consolidate democracy in the region, as it claims, then it must, firstly, respect the will of the peoples of the region and, secondly, apply pressure on Israel, which occupies land and practices aggression, to end the occupation and aggression."

"HAMAS has an interim political program that is not different, in essence, from the programs of the other factions, namely, the establishment of a Palestinian state on all the territories that were occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. It is not HAMAS' right, or the right of anyone else, to shut the door in the face of future Palestinian generations regarding crucial issues that the Palestinian people at home and abroad must determine when the right time comes."

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"Power of Joint Action"

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Maha Sultan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (1/30): "HAMAS asserted that it will engage in a domestic dialogue and will not monopolize power.... These positions, undoubtedly, deserve a bow of respect.... HAMAS, which the people gave the power to act unilaterally, without a partner, prefers to see its enormous victory as a victory for everyone and to share this victory, with its positive and negative aspects and responsibilities, with everyone. Only then will the relationship with the foreign world, regionally and

internationally, and the management of the conflict with Israel,  
be based on a correct and sound foundation."

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